

Digital Empowerment of Algerian Youth: A Socio-Statistical Investigation Based on Official Reports

إشكالية التمكين الرقمي للشباب في الجزائر قراءة سوسيواحصائية في التقارير الرسمية

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Abstract:

This study aims to address the issue of digital empowerment among youth, drawing on a set of official reports. The problem of digital empowerment for such a significant societal group warrants careful consideration and investigation. A socio-statistical approach to the analytical reading of these reports has enabled us to answer a pivotal question: Are the technical qualifications possessed by Algerian youth, which facilitate their access to the digital space and use of social networks, sufficient on their own? Or does this societal group face another challenge that we can term "digital empowerment," which requires precise identification and, subsequently, the construction of an effective strategy to optimally utilize their capabilities and rationally employ their energies.

Keywords: Generation; digital space; social networks; digital identity; Youth.

ملخص:

يهدف هذا البحث إلى معالجة مسألة التمكين الرقمي للشباب، بالاستناد إلى مجموعة من التقارير الرسمية. إن مشكلة التمكين الرقمي لهذه الفئة الاجتماعية الهامة تستدعي دراسة وفحصاً دقيقين. وقد مكنتنا النهج الاجتماعي والإحصائي في القراءة التحليلية لهذه التقارير من الإجابة على سؤال محوري: هل

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المؤهلات التقنية التي يتمتع بها الشباب الجزائري، والتي تسهل وصولهم إلى الفضاء الرقمي واستخدامهم للشبكات الاجتماعية، كافية بحد ذاتها؟ أم أن هذه الفئة الاجتماعية تواجه تحديًا آخر يمكن أن نطلق عليه "التمكين الرقمي"، والذي يتطلب تحديدًا دقيقًا، وبالتالي بناء استراتيجية فعالة للاستفادة الأمثل من قدراتهم واستخدام طاقاتهم بشكل عقلاني. الكلمات المفتاحية: الجيل؛ الفضاء الرقمي؛ الشبكات الاجتماعية؛ الهوية الرقمية؛ الشباب.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الجيل؛ الفضاء الرقمي؛ شبكات التواصل الاجتماعي؛ الهوية الرقمية؛ الشباب.

1. Introduction:

Globalization has significantly reduced boundaries and has given rise to new values and beliefs. Technological tools have facilitated the emergence and spread of these values, ushering in a new era known as the digital age. This has led to a digital transformation across all aspects of life. Academic studies, official reports, and field observations indicate a shift in the lifestyles and daily routines of individuals, particularly young people. Notably, there has been a substantial increase in the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) among youth, as evidenced by statistics and official reports. Given their abilities and qualifications, young people can easily access and use the digital space regularly. This research paper seeks to address the issue of digital empowerment among youth by posing a key question:

Do Algerian youth, with their existing qualifications, require digital empowerment? Or do we face a different challenge, requiring precise identification and the development of an effective strategy to optimize their capabilities and talents?

2. Scholars' Perspectives on ICT Use

Experts generally categorize users of Information and Communication Technologies into three main groups:

2.1 Technophobes

This group is wary of ICTs and completely rejects their use due to their perceived risks to physical, mental, and psychological health, as well as their potential impact on overall lifestyle. We believe that this viewpoint is difficult, if not impossible, to implement in the current context. Academic studies, official reports, and field observations indicate a shift in the lifestyles and daily routines of Algerian individuals, especially young people. Notably, there has been a substantial increase in the use of ICTs among youth, as evidenced by statistics and official reports.

Or do we face a different challenge, requiring precise identification and the development of an effective strategy to optimize their capabilities and talents?

2.2 Technophiles

Advocates of this group promote the excessive use of ICTs in all aspects of life, including personal, public, and professional spheres. They believe there should be no limits or restrictions on the use of these technologies. We believe that this perspective overemphasizes the benefits of ICTs. The negative impacts on the physical, mental, and psychological health of users due to excessive use and addiction to these technologies undermine the validity of this viewpoint.

2. 3 Proponents of Rational Use This group advocates for a balanced approach to ICT use, neither excessive nor restrictive. They emphasize the need for rational and judicious use of these technologies.

3.The Concept of Youth

The concept of youth signifies a transitional life stage between childhood and adulthood. Sociologically, age is considered a social construct that evolves within a historical context. Karl Mannheim argued that the concept of a generation, as a group of individuals of approximately the same age, is fundamental. It derives its significance from its potential to analyze and understand rapid societal transformations. The primary criterion for shaping a generation's social identity is shared historical experiences, especially the collective worldview derived from those experiences. (Donfut,C Daveau, P,2004,101-113).

The concept of a generation is central to the study of youth as a social group and to explaining phenomena related to historical development and analyzing the determinants of social change. Referring to theoretical concepts in specialized dictionaries and encyclopedias, the external factor that gives this generation its identity, and can be considered a generative event that defines its contemporaneity and shapes its collective memory, is its deep involvement, even immersion, in the digital revolution. This generation's ability to possess the means and easily interact with and utilize information and communication technologies, compared to previous generations, is a defining characteristic. In this context, and based on the continuous immersion of youth in digital media, leading to a new form of youth upbringing, this generation can be termed the "digital generation".

4. The Concept of Social Media Networks

Social media networks are defined as a system of electronic networks comprising a group of members who share common interests and concerns. Social media platforms are classified

as second-generation web (Web 2.0) sites (2011،07، فضل الله). These platforms enable individuals to connect and interact with others through various means such as messaging, chatting, sharing photos and videos, and exchanging comments.

5. Algerian Youth's Digital Skills and Qualifications: Evidence from Official Reports

5.1 Sociodemographic Determinants of Social Media Users

Initially, it's essential to note that Algeria's population stands at 43 million according to the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS6) of 2019, as reported in the final results for December 2020. Youth constitutes a significant portion of this population. In the absence of the final results from the general population and housing census conducted between September 25 and October 9, 2022, we relied on this report. Another report indicates that approximately 50.6% of the population is male, while females constitute 49.4%. This near-equal gender representation can be attributed to several factors:

- Gender parity within the 20-29 age group in Algeria is relatively balanced, according to Statistics (2016،07، الديوان الوطني للإحصاء)
- The 20-29 age group represents the largest proportion of social media users due to having more free time.

Rising education levels in Algeria, both for males and females, from 7.9% in 2008 to 8.3% in 2012, have contributed to increased digital literacy. The number of university students and graduates has also increased significantly (2016،30، الديوان الوطني للإحصاء). This, in turn, has:

- Fostered a desire and ability to engage deeply in the digital revolution.
- Facilitated the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs).
- Simplified the use of social media platforms.
- Widespread mobile phone ownership: A separate official report (الديوان الوطني للإحصاء، 2013،09) indicates that 92.2% of urban dwellers and 87.7% of rural inhabitants own mobile phones. This suggests that geographical location is not a significant barrier to digital access.
- Increased network coverage: The number of mobile network licenses has substantially grown (02، 2015، سلطة الضبط), reducing the digital divide between urban and rural areas.

5.2 Digital Competencies of Social Media Users

An official report (10، 2021، سلطة الضبط) indicates that mobile phone subscribers in Algeria account for 90. 22% of the total subscriber base, estimated at 52. 11 million, compared to only 9. 78% for fixed-line subscribers. Out of the total 52. 4 million mobile subscribers, 41.

78 million use 3G or 4G technology, representing 88.86%, while 10.62 million use GSM technology, accounting for 11.14%.

According to Statista.com (January 2024), there are 5.35 billion internet users worldwide, representing 66.2 % of the global population. Of these, 5.04 billion use social media, equating to 62.3 % of the world's population.

Regarding the most popular social media platforms worldwide based on active users according to Statista.com (January 2024), the ranking is as follows:

- ❖ Facebook: 3.049 billion users
- ❖ YouTube: 2.491 billion users
- ❖ WhatsApp: 2 billion users
- ❖ Instagram: 2 billion users
- ❖ TikTok: 1.562 billion users

In Algeria, according to Algerieinvest.dz (January 2023), the most popular social media platforms are:

- ❖ YouTube: 22.70 million users
- ❖ Facebook: 20.80 million users
- ❖ Messenger: 13.60 million users
- ❖ Instagram: 8.40 million users
- ❖ Snapchat: 6.95 million users

The statistics presented in these official reports reflect the following:

- ✓ **Digital Engagement:** Algerian youth have a strong desire and ability to engage in the digital revolution. They represent a generation with distinct physiological, social, cultural, and behavioral characteristics compared to previous generations.
- ✓ **Digital Influence:** This generation is deeply influenced by digital imagery and is constantly exposed to a massive influx of information that shapes their thoughts, tastes, clothes, and values.
- ✓ **Social Interaction:** Social media has become a routine aspect of social life for Algerian youth, shaping and reshaping their reality through continuous online interactions.

6. The Rationalization and Moderation of Digital Empowerment for Youth A Necessity :

Based on a socio-statistical reading of official reports, we believe that Algerian youth who use

the digital space, particularly social media, require a digital empowerment that is grounded in rationality and moderation. This necessitates the following:

- ✓ **A Realistic and Sound Understanding of Youth Needs:** This can only be achieved through peer-to-peer engagement (i.e., from youth to youth). Youth can be involved in identifying their most pressing needs. Additionally, rigorous academic studies, employing a multidisciplinary approach, are essential. Collaboration with various stakeholders who work with this demographic, including youth organizations, government agencies, civil society, families, intellectuals, educational institutions, and media outlets, is crucial.
- ✓ **Digital Literacy and Awareness:** Youth must be educated on the appropriate use of information and communication technologies. This includes raising awareness of the potential risks, such as those related to mental health and national security. Given the constant exposure of youth to online content, ongoing support and guidance from various stakeholders are essential to promote the responsible use of digital technologies. This will enable youth to actively participate in civic affairs.
- ✓ **Strengthening Real-World Social Connections:** Efforts should be made to reinforce the importance of real-world social interactions and to establish the understanding that the virtual world is an extension of the real world, not a replacement.
- ✓ **Promoting Digital Well-being:** Focus should be placed on ensuring the physical and mental well-being of individuals in the digital realm, promoting what is known as "digital quality of life."
- ✓ **Bridging the Digital Divide:** Efforts should be made to reduce digital illiteracy and ensure that all members of society can participate in the digital world.

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, to effectively empower youth in any society through digital means, a comprehensive strategy is required that encompasses both material and human resources. This strategy must be implemented in phases and involve consultation with various stakeholders. Moreover, digital empowerment is an ongoing process with far-reaching goals that cannot be confined to a specific timeframe. Therefore, it is essential to rationalize and moderate this process to ensure the safety and security of youth while using information and communication technologies, particularly social media. This requires a thorough understanding of the needs and priorities of this important demographic through a multidisciplinary research strategy.

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